

NEWS

From the Office of

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County Secures Satellite Phones for Emergency Response

Seventy phones issued to local agencies

SAN BERNARDINO – The County of San Bernardino on February 7 began distributing 70 satellite phones to local agencies in an effort to improve communications in the event of a disaster.

“Our region is long overdue for a powerful earthquake,” said First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who serves as an appointee of Governor Schwarzenegger on the state’s Seismic Safety Commission. “During an earthquake, it’s likely that both landline and cellular phone systems will be down and we’ll need alternate means of communication.”

The phones were distributed at the quarterly meeting of the Operational Area Coordinating Council, a group that includes emergency operations personnel from the County and each city within the county.

The San Bernardino County Office of Emergency Services (OES), a division of the County Fire Department, which is governed by the County Board of Supervisors, coordinated the acquisition of the important new communication devices in order to enhance the County’s emergency management and response. Using almost \$100,000 of Homeland Security Grant money, the Office of Emergency Services purchased and distributed the satellite phones to law enforcement, fire and emergency management jurisdictions within the county’s expansive boundaries.

“The goal of purchasing and distributing the phones is to enhance the ability of the county’s many varied and widespread jurisdictions to communicate and operate cohesively during an emergency,” added Mitzelfelt. “Using satellite technology, these phones will function as additional means of communication even when other lines of communication are impaired.”

“These phones are not intended for day to day use,” said Denise Benson, Division Manager of the Office of Emergency Services. “They will serve as an alternate form of communication – another tool in San Bernardino County’s emergency management toolbox.”

OES will maintain a database with the contact information for each of the phones to improve interoperability between jurisdictions. Interoperability is an important concept for public safety officials because first responders and emergency managers need to be able to communicate during a wide-scale disaster. The phones are intended to help entities communicate across local, county, state and federal boundaries.

Five cities and towns in the First District received the phones, as well as eight fire departments and six law enforcement agencies. Several county departments including the Sheriff’s Department, Fire Department, the Department of Public Health and the Department of Public Works also received phones.